

Senate Gavel

The Senate lacks a specific symbol of authority such as the mace employed in the House of Representatives. In its place, a small ivory gavel conveys a sense of the institution's continuity and the importance of order in its proceedings. At the start of each daily session, a Senate page carries a small mahogany box with a hinged glass top into the Senate chamber and places it on the presiding officer's desk. The box, which remains on that desk whenever the Senate is in session, contains two handleless hour-glass-shaped solid ivory gavels, each two-and-one-half-inches high. The older gavel may have been used in the late eighteenth century by the Senate's first presiding officer, but was certainly in service by 1834. By the 1940s, that gavel had begun to deteriorate. In 1954, during a heated, late-night debate on atomic energy, Vice President Richard Nixon pounded the instrument so vigorously that it splintered. Later that year, the government of India presented a replacement gavel that duplicated the original with the addition of a floral band carved around its center. When the chamber becomes noisy, any member may request the presiding officer to suspend proceedings and restore order with a vigorous pounding of the gavel.